

Message Text

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SUBJ: PANAMANIAN REACTION TO SNYDER AMENDMENT

REF: A) PANAMA 3817; B) PANAMA 3854; USIS PANAMA MEDIA REACTION 6/30

SUMMARY: ALTHOUGH TORRIJOS SET STATESMANLIKE TONE FOR CALM PUBLIC REACTION TO SNYDER AMENDMENT, THE JOLT WENT DEEP AND PANAMANIAN ARE STILL DIGESTING ITS SIGNIFICANCE. NOTHING IN RECENT MONTHS HAS PROVIDED PANAMANIAN TREATY OPPONENTS BETTER OPPORTUNITY FOR ACTION. THE NEWS OF THE CONGRESSIONAL AMENDMENT ACTION TRIGGERED A DEMONSTRATION AT THE EMBASSY AND FOREIGN MINISTRY BY RADICAL ANTI-U.S. AND ANTI-GOP STUDENTS. THE LEADERSHIP OF PANAMA'S NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVES ISSUED A RESOLUTION EXPRESSING SUPPORT FOR THE NEGOTIATIONS. PRESS COMMENTARY HAS GENERALLY FOLLOWED MODERATE LINE AND HAS UNDERLINED REPORTS FROM U.S. OF THE U.S. EXECUTIVE'S COMMITMENT TO CONTINUE THE NEGOTIATIONS. EDITORIALS DESCRIBED SNYDER AMENDMENT AS PRIMARILY A U.S. PROBLEM. THE FEATURE EDITORIAL IN "DOMINICAL" JUNE 29 ASSERTED THAT OTHER NATIONS WERE CLOSELY FOLLOWING CANAL TREATY NEGOTIATIONS AND ANY FAILURE BY U.S. EXECUTIVE

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TO LIVE UP TO ITS COMMITMENT TO NEGOTIATE WITH PANAMA ALONG

LINE OF TACK-KISSINGER AGREEMENT WOULD CALL INTO QUESTION WHETHER U.S. COMMITMENTS ELSEWHERE WOULD BE HONORED. ONE PRESS ARTICLE SAID CONGRESSIONAL MOVE TO BLOCK RESOLUTION OF CANAL ISSUE THROUGH NEGOTIATION WOULD GIVE DANGEROUS STIMULUS TO THOSE IN PANAMA WHO FAVOR "OTHER MEANS" OF LIBERATION. END SUMMARY.

1. GENERAL TORRIJOS' STATESMANLIKE PUBLIC RESPONSE TO THE SNYDER AMENDMENT (REFTEL A) SET THE TONE FOR A CALM AND MEASURED PUBLIC REACTION IN PANAMA, BUT DESPITE THIS AND THE GENERALLY CALM MANNER IN WHICH THE PRESS HAS BEHAVED, THE SITUATION REMAINS TICKLISH. NOTHING IN RECENT MONTHS HAS OFFERED THE ANTI-U.S. AND ANTI-GOP RADICAL OPPONENTS OF COMPROMISE IN THE NEGOTIATIONS A BETTER OPPORTUNITY TO PROVOKE CONFRONTATIONS. THE STUDENT DEMONSTRATION JUNE 30 BY SECONDARY STUDENTS OF THE REVOLUTIONARY STUDENTS FRONT (FER), FIRST AT THE EMBASSY AND THEN AT THE FOREIGN MINISTRY, HAD ANTI-U.S. AND ANTI-GOP THEMES. THE NATIONAL GUARD, BY CALM BUT FIRM TREATMENT OF THE DEMONSTRATORS, WAS ABLE TO AVOID SERIOUS TROUBLE (REF B). BUT THE STUDENTS WERE NOT SATISFIED AND STRONGLY CRITICIZED GOP'S PASSIVE ATTITUDE. THEY REPORTEDLY EXTRACTED FROM ACTING FOREIGN MINISTER A PROMISE TO LEAD A POPULAR DEMONSTRATION SHOULD THE SENATE APPROVE THE SNYDER AMENDMENT.

2. THE DIRECTORATE OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVES (COMPOSED OF ASSEMBLY'S NINE VICE PRESIDENTS) ISSUED A RESOLUTION WHICH DESCRIBED THE SNYDER AMENDMENT AS AN "INTERNAL ACT OF THE LEGISLATIVE ORGAN OF THE U.S., WHICH IT HAS THE RIGHT" (TO DO), BUT WHICH DEMONSTRATED A LACK OF HISTORICAL VISION. THE ASSEMBLY DECLARATION REAFFIRMED GOP'S DEMANDS FOR "RIGHTS USURPED IN A PERVERSE MANNER BY THE COLONIALISTS IN THE PANAMA CANAL ZONE" AND "MONOLITHICALLY" SUPPORTED GENERAL TORRIJOS' STATEMENT OF JUNE 26 (REFTEL A). IT ALSO FULLY SUPPORTED THE PANAMANIAN NEGOTIATORS' EFFORTS TO "DEFUSE THE TIME BOMB WHICH HAS BEEN GROWING IN THE CANAL ZONE SINCE JANUARY 9, 1964".

3. COMMENTS IN PANAMANIAN PRESS TO DATE HAVE EMPHASIZED THAT LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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WHITE HOUSE AND STATE DEPARTMENT HAVE OPPOSED THE CONGRESSIONAL ACTION AND THE U.S. REMAINS COMMITTED TO NEGOTIATE WITH PANAMA. THUS, GOP-CONTROLLED "DOMINICAL" JUNE 29 REPRODUCED JUNE 27 "MIAMI HERALD" EDITORIAL UNDER RED HEADLINE: "MIAMI HERALD SAYS: UNITED STATES IS COMMITTED TO NEGOTIATE WITH PANAMA." ALSO ON "DOMINICAL" FRONT PAGE WAS FEATURE ARTICLE BY EDITOR ALBERTO BARRERA INTERPRETING SNYDER AMENDMENT AS "AN INSULT TO THE STATE DEPARTMENT, SETTING BEFORE THE WORLD THE

IMAGE OF A COUNTRY WHICH DOES NOT RESPECT ITS PLEDGED WORD..."
AND AS SIGN UNITED STATES WAS ON "DESCENDING POWER CURVE"
BECAUSE OF A FAILURE TO RECOGNIZE HISTORICAL REALITY. HE
WENT ON TO STATE THE U.S., NOT PANAMA, WAS DAMAGED BY THE
SNYDER AMENDMENT BECAUSE PANAMA HAS BECOME THE "GREAT WINDOW
WHICH EXHIBITS TO THE WORLD UNITED STATES COLONIALISM..."
THE EFFECT IN PANAMA WAS TO INCREASE IMPATIENCE OF PANAMANIAN
PEOPLE AND, ACCORDING TO BARRERA, GIVE STIMULUS TO
THOSE FORCES IN PANAMA WHICH FAVOR "OTHER MEANS" OF LIBERATION
THAN NEGOTIATION.

4. FEATURE EDITORIAL OF "DOMINICAL" TITLED "GOVERNMENT IN A
PREDICAMENT" ALSO DESCRIBED SNYDER AMENDMENT AS PRINCIPALLY
U.S. PROBLEM. PETTY POLITICS IN U.S. WERE INTERFERING WITH
CONDUCT OF FOREIGN RELATIONS BY PRESIDENT AND STATE DEPART-
MENT. THE WORLD WAS LOOKING FOR RESULTS IN THE NEGOTIATIONS AND,
ACCORDING TO THE EDITORIAL, FAILURE OF THE UNITED STATES TO
LIVE UP TO ITS NEGOTIATING COMMITMENT WOULD CAUSE NUMEROUS
OTHER NATIONS WITH WHICH IT HAS COMMITMENTS TO QUESTION
WHETHER THOSE COMMITMENTS WOULD BE HONORED. PARTICULARLY IN
QUESTION WAS WHETHER COMMITMENTS SIGNED BY SECRETARY
KISSINGER-- THE TACK-KISSINGER DECLARATION-- WOULD BE HONORED.

5. SOME PRESS REACTIONS HAVE DESCRIBED THE AMENDMENT AS A
DELIBERATE PROVOCATION BY REACTIONARIES IN THE U.S. WHO WANT
TO TRICK PANAMANIAN INTO AN ILL-CONSIDERED REACTION. OTHERS
CALL IT "INTIMIDATION". THE WORDS "ABSURD" AND "STUPID" HAVE
ALSO BEEN FREQUENTLY USED.

6. COMMENT: PRIVATE COMMENTS WE HAVE HEARD TO DATE HAVE BEEN
LESS MODERATE THAN PUBLIC REACTION. EMBASSY CONTACTS HAVE
EXPRESSED DISBELIEF AND STRONG CONDEMNATION OF THE CON-
GRESSIONAL ACTION. PEOPLE WITH WHOM WE HAVE TALKED, IN-
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INCLUDING ONE NOT FRIENDLY TO THE GOP, HAVE EXPRESSED HOPE
TORRRIJOS CAN MANAGE THE SITUATION WITHOUT FURTHER CON-
FRONTATIONS. WE HAVE HAD REPORTS THAT LEADERS OF THE
PANAMANIAN STUDENT FEDERATION (FEP), NOT WISHING TO BE OUTDONE
BY THEIR SMALLER RIVAL FER PRIOR TO THE JULY STUDENT OR-
GANIZATION ELECTIONS, ARE TALKING OF ALSO STAGING A DEMON-
STRATION AT THE EMBASSY OVER THE SNYDER AMENDMENT. THE
SITUATION REMAINS TENSE.
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